

FFY 2011 State Plan Update - Attachment 4.2(c) Summary of Input and Recommendations of the State Rehabilitation Council; Response of Designated State Unit; and Explanation of Input or Recommendations

This attachment addresses input and recommendations provided by the Washington State Rehabilitation Council to the Washington State Division of Vocational Rehabilitation from October 1, 2008 through September 30, 2009.

In 2009 the WSRC offered input to our policy partners at the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) on four topics:

1. The use of funds received from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act;
2. The content of Section 4.11 (c) (1) "The Goals and Strategies" portion of the FFY 2010-FFY 2013 DVR State Plan;
3. The content of Section 4.11(d) "State Strategies and Use of Title 1 Funds for Innovation and Expansion Activities;" and,
4. Advocating Contingency Planning Should State Match not be secured for FFY 2011.

Additionally the Washington State Rehabilitation Council gathered input for DVR from customers about their satisfaction with DVR services at four customer forums held October 16, 2008 in SeaTac, January 15, 2009 in Olympia, April 16, 2009 in Silverdale and July 16, 2009 in Vancouver.

1. Washington State Rehabilitation Council Input on use of American Recovery and Reinvestment Act Funds

On March 27, 2009 members of the Planning, Policy & Advocacy Subcommittee sent a correspondence to DVR regarding factors the Council hoped would be considered in spending the \$8.8 million Washington DVR received from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. The memo stated,

"We request that the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation factor the following four outcomes in the Division's use of federal Recovery Act funds:

- 1. Funds be used with the most direct benefit to the effort of DVR customers seeking to overcome barriers to employment;*
- 2. Funds be used to address a greater portion of the unmet need regarding access to services, supports, and medications required by customers seeking extended supports while using DVR's time limited supports to secure and sustain supported employment;*
- 3. Funds be used to support an increased percentage of the customer base to prepare for and make direct connections with employers offering positions consistent with their job goals;*

4. *Funds be used in support of the goals and priorities included in Section 4.11 (c) (1) of the FFY 2009 DVR state plan."*

DVR Response

While DVR was in Order of Selection, there were many otherwise eligible individuals who stopped applying for services because they did not meet the criteria of "most significant" or "significant" disabilities, and they knew it was likely they would be on the waiting list for an extended period. Many of these were individuals with disabilities who had experienced recent job loss, qualified for employment above entry level, and were seeking DVR services for rapid job placement. Often, these were individuals who have significant disabilities with substantial barriers to employment, yet qualify to enter jobs at mid-to-high levels.

DVR decided to use ARRA funds to specifically target this customer population in an effort to expand services to a broader segment of eligible individuals with disabilities. Additionally, DVR chose to use stimulus dollars in this manner to build a more rapid job placement model that results in full-time employment with higher wages and benefits. Once developed and tested, this model will be integrated in to DVR's regular service delivery to benefit all customers.

The SRC's recommendation that ARRA funds be used to intensify services for existing customers was considered. However, DVR felt that sufficient resources already were available to improve services to existing customers along the lines of the SRC's recommendations. Instead of using ARRA funds to supplement existing service delivery, DVR chose to use these one-time resources to expand service delivery to a broader population of eligible individuals.

2. Washington State Rehabilitation Council Input Regarding Content of Section 4.11 (c) (1) "The Goals and Strategies" portion of the FFY 2010-FFY 2013 DVR State Plan

On April 17, 2009 the full Council voted to endorse the goals and strategies the Planning, Policy, & Advocacy Subcommittee wrote to DVR regarding Section 4.11 (c) (1) of the FFY 2010-2013 State Plan. The objectives reflected in our feedback were to encourage DVR to increase emphasis on the qualitative aspects of counseling and guidance, to encourage DVR to provide the training and supervision staff needs to support stronger qualitative outcomes, and to suggest two additional goals including:

"Increase the number of individuals achieving employment who earn a living wage with benefits and may be eligible for union membership;

Increase the availability of long term supports needed by individuals to achieve and sustain supported employment."

DVR Response

DVR has implemented these recommendations by:
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- 1) Using ARRA funds to create a model of service delivery that results in faster job placement in occupations that pay mid-to-high salaries with benefits.
- 2) Modifying the contract for CRP job placement to pay a bonus when a job is full-time with health benefits provided by the employer.
- 3) Continuing to work with developmental disabilities and mental health partners to increase the availability of long term support for customers. However, the reality of the state's budget has caused a reduction in the availability of funding for these services. We continuously look for other sources of support such as natural supports, Social Security work incentives, peer support, etc.
- 4) Modifying and implementing self-employment policies for customers and developing new self-employment consultants statewide to increase the success and wage opportunities for customers in self-employment.

3. Washington State Rehabilitation Council Input Regarding Content of Section 4.11(d) "State Strategies and Use of Title 1 Funds for Innovation and Expansion Activities"

The full text of the April 17, 2009 is included in the appendix to this update.

On June 24, 2009 the Council Chair provided a written response to DVR regarding 4.11(d) "State Strategies and Use of Title 1 Funds for Innovation and Expansion Activities. The correspondence stated:

"We have more reservation about Section 4.11 (d) "State Strategies and Use of Title 1 Funds for Innovation and Expansion Activities." Our concern about the section is not about the strategies included, rather, we were struck by the lack of new ideas reflected. DVR is already employing the majority of these strategies. We would encourage DVR's Senior Leadership Team to take a second look at the input offered by the stakeholders who attended the public forums we co-sponsored in May to strengthen the section."

DVR Response

Washington DVR recognizes that a variety of recommendations and suggestions have been brought forth by stakeholders for potential innovation and expansion activities that have not been implemented. Maximum Title I funds are being directed towards regular service delivery rather than reserved for new innovation and expansion activities. The division's targeted innovation and expansion activities have been deliberately chosen to improve the jobs that DVR customers obtain (ie, higher wages, increased hours, and health care benefits). This will continue to be a focus through the duration of this state plan. If resources become available for additional innovation and expansion activities without diminishing regular service delivery then other activities will be considered.

4. Washington State Rehabilitation Council Advocates for DVR to Communicate Contingency Plan Should State Match Not Be Secured

On September 22, 2009 our Council Chair wrote a letter to the Director of DVR requesting additional information about the timeframe needed to prepare for entering Order of Selection if DVR did not succeed in securing state match. The letter said in part,

“Our Council has a statutory role in being stewards of the publically funded Vocational Rehabilitation System in our state. In that capacity we have a responsibility to expect and support the best outcome, but to plan for the alternative. Over the last quarter we have discussed how critical it will be for DVR to secure state match. Our particular concern is for FFY 2011. We will be dedicated advocates for DVR funding. Still, there is no guarantee that these efforts will be successful. The Council would like to understand how much lead time would be needed for the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation to plan for, communicate with partners, and implement a well organized entrance back into the Order of Selection.

“This is not the potentiality that anyone wants to realize. And while we are hoping for the best and being successful in obtaining sufficient state match dollars, we should discuss the plan for the worst case scenario. My experience in the last go around is that OOS was all new and no one had the answers but we now have experienced this and have learned hopefully from what worked and what didn’t. Since this was new all of us went into this rather blithely with little preparation. We would support a plan that would facilitate the most organized, transparent planning process, and an expeditious, considered exit. Without understanding the lead time needed both, the Division and the Council will be at a disadvantage, and the credibility DVR has worked hard to earn with community partners will be damaged.”

DVR Response

DVR appreciates the Council’s very strong support and advocacy to ensure that we receive a full state appropriation to meet the required federal match. DVR has worked closely with the Department of Social and Health Services Budget Office and the Governor’s Budget Office as well as the appropriations committees of the state Legislature to emphasize the importance of receiving a full state match. This resulted in adoption of a SFY 2011 state budget that fully matches DVR’s federal Title I grant.

Washington State Rehabilitation Council Gathered Input for DVR from Customers about Their Satisfaction with DVR Services

The Council sponsored four quarterly customer forums: October 16, 2008 in SeaTac, January 15, 2009 in Olympia, April 16, 2009 in Silverdale and July 16, 2009 in Vancouver. Forums provided an opportunity for DVR customers and stakeholders to offer feedback on customer satisfaction with VR services. The Council received public comment from 115 people in 2009. The DVR Director and local Supervisors were present in person to hear the comments directly.

The Council did not receive comment from a statistically significant sample of DVR's customer base; therefore we cannot assert that what we heard from those who commented is a statewide trend. We can say that there were common themes we heard from those who spoke including:

1. Customers requested more information throughout the VR process to make progress towards employment;
2. Customers expressed frustration about untimely responses to phone calls, and;
3. Customers expressed frustration with the length of time it took to achieve case movement.

DVR Response

The Chief of Field Services attends all SRC meetings and follows up with individual concerns expressed at the meeting with the DVR Director, Area Managers, Supervisors and customers. DVR continues to update program information in pamphlets and on the DVR Internet website.

DVR recognizes the common theme cited by the SRC's public forum and we continue to:

- 1) Look at strategies to reduce caseload size to be more responsive.
- 2) Reinforce compliance by DVR staff to comply with DSHS Policy 14.18 Voice Mail Standards requiring responses to telephone and other communications within the defined timeline.
- 3) Monitor case management progress with the utilization of the case management tracking tool.